



Haiti

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 8.9 million.

A U.N. Population Fund census released in May 2006 (based on 2003 data) reveals the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, 3 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 2.1 percent voodoo (vodun). Religious groups that constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Methodist, Episcopalian, Jehovah's Witness, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), Muslim, and other religious affiliations. Those who follow no religion number 10.2 percent. The figure for voodoo represents only those who select voodoo as their primary religion. A much larger segment of the population practices voodoo alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) and considers Christianity their primary religion.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, provided that these practices do not disturb law and order. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the Ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The Government observes Good Friday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects

their tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Requirements for registration with the Bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the Bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Although they are legally permitted to do so, many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status. According to the Government, many groups, Christian and voodoo, do not seek official recognition simply because they operate informally. There were no reports of this requirement hampering the operation of a religious group.

Goods imported for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some religious organizations complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor their tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

Historically, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 concordat, which serves as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" Masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day; however, the Government has recognized the increasing role of Protestant churches. For example, Episcopal and other Protestant clergy and voodoo practitioners have been invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches were present and operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Delays in issuing residence permits were attributed to bureaucracy.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. In most Catholic or Protestant schools, the school authorities require religious education but generally make provisions for students who are not affiliated with their religious group.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display great interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs.

Ecumenical organizations existed. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward voodoo ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. In the past these differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict, although not in

the last few years.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters. On December 12, 2007, representatives from both the Anglican Church and the Conference of Catholic Bishops were among the new councilors installed in the Provisional Electoral Council, mandated with conducting senatorial and other elections.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views, including on religious freedom.

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